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ADDRESS

BY

CHARLES W. FAIRBANKS

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY-FIFTH
ANNIVERSARY

OF THE

BATTLE OF MONMOUTH
FREEHOLD, N. J.

June 27, 1903

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CHARLES W. FAIRBANKS

29

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Fellow-citizens of New Jersey: We stand upon holy ground, for here was fought a battle for human freedom one hundred and twenty-five years ago. Here heroic men dared all and suffered all that this country might be the abode of liberty. Here our intrepid fathers challenged the imperial power of old England. Here was sown, in the blood of patriots, the seed of a nascent nation.

We are assembled with hearts full of reverence and gratitude; reverence for the God of battles, who directed aright the soldiers of the Continental army, and gratitude to those who gave their lives into the care and keeping of fate that liberty might triumph here.

We can not realize the true magnitude and significance of the engagement whose anniversary we celebrate, unless we turn back to the period of the Revolutionary struggle. They were men of might in those days. They were not great in numbers, but they had a great cause, and they were great in their complete consecration to it, and great in their moral and physical courage. Their deeds were worthy of those done in the palmiest days of chivalry.

The Continental army was poorly paid, poorly equipped and poorly fed; yet, it fought on with a grim determination, born of the sublimest purpose that ever summoned men to the field of Mars.

New Jersey, majestic commonwealth, hallowed by countless memories of the struggle for independence, does well to celebrate the battle of Monmouth, for here was waged one of the engagements of a contest fraught with mighty consequences, not only to her, but to the human race. The divine right of kings was believed by our forefathers to be a monstrous political heresy, and here they drew their sword to establish the true doctrine that the people rule by divine right.

The battle of Monmouth is familiar to the student of American history. The historian has recorded all its details—the preparation, the strategy of the op-

posing commanders and the charge. There is nothing new to be added. We can but recount the story as it has come down to us. However old, it possesses an everliving interest. We do not grow weary of the recital, for the field of glory possesses for the patriot a fascination that is as enduring as the stars.

When the American army went into winter quarters at Valley Forge, the cause of independence was at low ebb. There was the memory of Saratoga, it is true, but there was also the recollection of Germantown and the Brandywine. A more distressing spectacle to the cause of freedom can scarcely be conceived than that which was witnessed during the winter preceding the engagement at Monmouth. The supersession of Washington as commander-in-chief of the army was plotted, and want and suffering pervaded the ranks. Officers and men shared alike their misfortunes. The weather was intensely cold; many of the regiments were barefooted, and they left their footprints of blood in the snows; their clothing was scanty, their quarters were rude huts filled with straw, and without ample blankets. Food was scarce. In short, everything was wanting to make up the ideal army, except indomitable pluck and inflexible purpose. The sharp blasts of winter could not extinguish the fires of liberty which burned in the breasts of the soldiers of Washington, and the cabals of envy and jealousy could not wrest his rightful leadership from the commander-in-chief. His men loved and believed in him, and they followed him with a semi-idolatry. He was securely intrenched in their confidence, safe beyond the reach of malicious intrigue.

A more touching spectacle was never presented to the imagination, outside of the realms of pure romance, than was presented by that band of patriots at Valley Forge.

With all the discouraging circumstances which surrounded them the army was not idle, nor indifferent to the great issue which was committed to its keep-

ing. The long and weary months were given over to drill and preparation.

In February, 1778, Baron Steuben, a Prussian soldier, joined the army at Valley Forge. He was skilled in the art of arms and was thoroughly loyal to the American cause. He soon won the confidence of Washington, and to him was intrusted the important task of instructing the men in military tactics. He took the raw material, than which there was no better, and readily and rapidly molded it into an effective and invincible fighting machine.

The British army occupied Philadelphia and was quite differently circumstanced from the one at Valley Forge. It was well housed, well dressed, well fed, well paid and confident. It did not entertain a doubt of the ultimate triumph of the royal cause.

The winter was one long period of ease and pleasure. The theater and the gaming table afforded adequate diversion for the British officers, and about the banquet board, toasts were proposed and drunk to the health of the English sovereign and to the early success of his cause. All of which seemed like a cruel mockery to the half-starved army which lay at Valley Forge some twenty miles away.

The conclusion of a treaty of amity and armed alliance with the French government, in February, 1778, was an event of potent significance, but it was some months before the intelligence reached our army.

"The seventh day of May, 1778," says General Carrington, "was not entirely a day of gloom for the American army, then encamped at Valley Forge. The breath of spring quickened nature, and the forest began to stir and bud for its next campaign.

"So the breath of heaven bore a French frigate, *La Sensible*, thirty-six guns, to Falmouth harbor (Portland), Maine, and there landed from her deck a herald of France, and he proclaimed an armed alliance between his country and the United States.

"On the 7th of May, at 9 o'clock a. m., the American army was on parade. Drums beat and cannon were fired, as if for some victory. It was a day of jubilee, a rare occurrence for the time and place.

"The brigades were steady, but not brilliant in their formation. Uniforms were scarce. Many feet were bare. Many had no coats. Some wore coats made of the remnants of their winter blankets. The pomp and circumstance of war was wanting. Strongly marked faces, good muscle, and vigorous action were to be discovered; but there was no such surpassing display of extrinsic splendor as enlivened Philadelphia, only eleven days later.

"There was no review by general officers, with a well-appointed staff. Few matrons and few maidens looked on. There stood before each brigade its chaplain. God's ambassador was made the voice to explain this occasion of their expenditure of greatly needed powder. The treaty of alliance was read, and in solemn silence the American army at Valley Forge united in thanksgiving to Almighty God that he had given them one friend on earth.

"One theme was universal, and it flutters yet in the breasts of millions:

" 'Praise God from whom all blessings flow.' "

"Huzzas for the King of France, for Washington and the republic, with caps tossed high in air, and a rattling fire through the whole line, terminated the humble pageant."

When the British received intelligence that France had fitted out a fleet to aid the American cause, they decided to evacuate Philadelphia and seek New York city. General Clinton, an able officer, was in command of the British forces, the pick and flower of the British army. It would be of interest chiefly to military strategists to follow in detail the maneuvers of the British forces from Philadelphia, and of the American army from Valley Forge, to the engage-

ment at Monmouth. The story has been too frequently told to need detailed repetition.

General Clinton sought to regain New York, and General Washington, who had anticipated his evacuation of Philadelphia, left Valley Forge in pursuit of him. He overtook the enemy, and the battle of Monmouth was fought on Sunday, June 28, 1778, a sacred day devoted to a holy cause. No fitter day in which patriots could fight; no fitter day in which they could die.

The forces engaged in each army were substantially equal. The battle raged fiercely throughout the day. There were many attacks and surprises, retreats and rallies. There were at times confusion and doubt as to the result of the contest. There were many instances of great courage and exceptional bravery in both armies.

The gallantry of Washington's officers and men was most admirable. They were inspired by their great commander, who pressed forward with the zeal of a crusader. But for the masterly genius and daring of Washington a different result might, and probably would, have been recorded here. When the retreat of the troops under Lee threatened the army with confusion and disaster, Washington went to the front with all possible dispatch. He filled officers and men with new courage; he was greeted with cheers and hats high in air, and the retreating troops were turned against the enemy, and seeming disaster was in good time turned into victory. Panic and disorder were followed by confidence and an orderly reformation of the lines of battle. It was indeed fortunate that willing and brave men had an unquestioning faith in their supreme commander, and that the commander knew the excellent fiber of his men.

We are told that: "The rout of the grenadiers by Wayne virtually closed the battle of Monmouth. For a short time afterwards the conflict was continued. * * * The sun was now near the horizon,

the long summer day, then drawing to its close, had been one of the hottest ever known, and the troops were worn down with fatigue; yet Washington immediately resolved to pursue the advantage he had gained and attack the forces of Clinton in their new and strong position. * * * The Commander-in-Chief, who had been in the saddle during nearly the whole day, regardless of fatigue or danger, lay down on the battlefield wrapped in his cloak, and passed the night in the midst of his soldiers. The conflict of the day, disastrous enough at first, had ended with a decided advantage to the American arms, and he felt confident of a decisive victory on the morrow. But the returning daylight dispelled all his hopes, for the bivouac-ground of the royal troops was vacant, and not a scarlet uniform save those of the dead and wounded could be seen on the heights and plains of Freehold."

"The fires were bright in Clinton's camp,
 But long ere morning's dawn
 His beaten host was on the tramp
 And all the foes were gone.
 Never again may cannon sweep
 Where waves the golden grain,
 And ne'er again an army sleep
 Upon old Monmouth's plain."

"Washington animated his forces," said Gordon, "by his gallant example, and by exposing his person to every danger common to the meanest soldier," and "the behavior of the American troops in general, after recovering from the first surprise occasioned by the retreat was mentioned as what could not be surpassed."

"It was impossible," said Stedman, "to attack Washington's front with any prospect of success; the judicious position which he took probably saved his advance corps from total ruin."

Yonder monument, among other things, seeks to perpetuate the memory and service of Molly Pitcher. Although she did not at the time of the battle bear a

commission, she rendered service and gave proof of her devotion to the sublime cause which entitles her to the highest mark of gratitude that can be expressed by a grateful people for those who go down to the battlefields of their country. We are told that a young cannoneer fell mortally wounded, and his piece was about to be taken by the enemy, when his wife, Molly Pitcher, who had been carrying water to the soldiers, fearlessly seized the rammer, reloaded the cannon and fired it with fatal effect upon the advancing foe. For this heroic deed, Washington gave her a sergeant's commission, and she was thereafter known as "Captain Molly."

This beautiful incident is but illustrative of the devotion to the cause of the women of the Revolution.

We can not forget, and we should not forget, the services of the mothers in that mighty contest, freighted with such far-reaching consequences to the human race. We are told that "when the resources of the country scarcely allowed the scantiest supply of clothing and provisions, the British cruisers on the coast destroyed every hope of aid from merchant vessels; when, to the distressed troops their cup of misfortune seemed full to overflowing, and there appeared no prospect of relief, except from the benevolence of their fellow-citizens; when even the ability of these was exhausted by repeated applications—then it was that the women of Pennsylvania and New Jersey, by their zealous exertions and willing service, accomplished what had been thought impossible. Not only was the pressure of want removed, but the sympathy and favor of the fair daughters of America, says one of the journals, operated like a charm on the soldier's heart, gave vigor to exertion, confidence to his hopes of success and the ultimate certainty of victory and peace."

Upon New Jersey's soil were fought the most decisive engagements of the Revolution. The victories of Trenton, Princeton and Monmouth, vitally affected the American cause. Here where we stand to-day,

was fought the last serious engagement in the North. The British forces had forever lost New England, and at Monmouth they foresaw the end of the effort to recover the middle Colonies.

The battle of Monmouth put new hope into the hearts and increased strength into the arms of the American soldiers. It easily marked the beginning of the end. Thenceforth no army led by Washington met defeat.

New Jersey did well her part in the battle of Monmouth. To her militia, under the gallant Dickinson, belongs the honor of firing the shot opening the engagement. General Washington congratulated her militia "for their nobleness in opposing the enemy on their march from Philadelphia and for the aid which they have given in embarrassing them and impeding their motions so as to allow the Continental troops to come up with them."

As we recount the deeds of heroism done here, as we recall the story of carnage and death, we have no trace of bitterness in our hearts. We see men stoutly opposing each other, fighting for that which their consciences commanded. Right and wrong grappled for the mastery, and right won. Liberty triumphed. We share not in the bitterness which divided the contending hosts; that faded away at Yorktown.

The personnel of the American army invites our attention. Some of the greatest names in the history of America, yes, in all history, opposed the British forces at Monmouth. There was George Washington, whose fame is as deathless as immortality; and there was Alexander Hamilton, then but twenty-two years old, an aid to the commander-in-chief, a very genius in statesmanship; and there was also John Marshall, who, later, as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, interpreted the constitution so as to make secure forever the fruits gathered here one hundred and twenty-five years ago. And there was James Madison, the fifth President of the United States; to his wisdom and labor, more than

to that of any other man, we are indebted for the Federal constitution. Here fought also the brave Lafayette, whose name is forever associated with Washington and the Revolution. Baron Steuben, whose military skill and loyalty proved a tower of strength, was here; and here fought also Greene and Wayne, Scott and Knox, Ogden and Frelinghuysen, and others equally deserving of mention and equally enshrined in the affections of the American people. Their names are inscribed upon the everlasting pillars of American independence.

Here liberty and monarchy contested for the mastery. Here treason sought to betray the Continental army, but treachery was impotent against the fearless army of Washington. It succeeded only in making infamous the name Charles Lee, and in making more luminous the deeds of those whom all the wealth royalty could give, and all the decorations it could confer, could not swerve from their arduous and exalted task. The enemy, through the subtle, insidious form of a weak and crafty traitor, could not win a victory. The battle of Monmouth teaches us the fadeless beauty of loyal devotion upon the field, and the endless infamy of treachery to those who bare their breasts to the pitiless hail of war.

Some of the soldiers who died here for liberty, sleep in unknown graves. For one century and a quarter they have so slept. No; not unknown, for God Almighty knows where every soldier of the American Revolution yielded up the last full measure of his devotion to the sacred cause of his countrymen. No monument of granite or marble or bronze is necessary to mark the place where their ashes rest, for a greater monument than these has risen above and about them — the sublimest monument that ever commemorated the valor of the dead, and that is, this mighty fabric of human liberty, the republic of the United States.

The battle of Monmouth gave new encouragement and increased hope to that small and brave people,

battling against great odds, to be free. It firmly established Washington in the confidence of his patriotic countrymen. It was not in itself decisive of the great contest. It was but one of the many fortuitous engagements which, in the end, gave us Yorktown. Monmouth was but one of the events, an important one, indeed, in the complex problem which was in process of solution for seven long, tedious and weary years.

The Revolutionary war, measured by the tremendous results which flowed from it, was one of the greatest in all human history. The prize of battle was free government, an experiment which menaced the foundations of monarchical government everywhere. The Revolutionary war was fought to establish the exalted doctrines which found utterance in the Declaration of Independence. What Thomas Jefferson wrote with the pen, George Washington wrote with the sword at Monmouth. The declaration that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," was meaningless, until the men of the Revolution wrote it in their blood, here and elsewhere. With their lives they sanctified this field to human freedom.

The struggle of our fathers to establish human liberty is one of the sublimest events in recorded history. It is a profoundly pathetic story. It fills us with immeasurable admiration and inexpressible gratitude. We can not forget it if we would, and we would not if we could. They fought under a brief code. The world could understand it. England did not need it interpreted: Liberty or death. England learned the tragic significance of this at Monmouth and on other fields, where she met the Continental forces.

We can not contemplate the condition of New Jersey when Monmouth was given to history, without noting the contrast with to-day. It is scarcely

credible that the conditions, as we witness them, are the actual development of one hundred and twenty-five years of human effort. New Jersey was resolute in purpose, and was the theater of some of the most important military engagements of the Revolution. There was nothing in that early period to suggest her present material strength, her progress in education and in all the great departments of the most advanced civilization. She has made her rich contribution to our national development and has been loyal to our national interests. She has sent her sons down to all the battlefields of the republic to uphold the national integrity, and preserve, unsullied, the national honor. Her sons have been filled with the spirit of the fathers, who so resolutely contested England's power upon this historic field. Though ever ready to do battle for their country, the people of New Jersey have preferred the ways of peace. They have possessed a realizing sense that "Peace hath her victories, no less renowned than war."

The splendid commonwealth in whose achievements we share a common pride, is rich and powerful. Her industrial centers have brought her deserved renown, and have promised still greater rewards. But these do not constitute her chief title to our respect and admiration. Her justice, her charity, her patriotism, are her claim to the regard which exalteth the State and endureth.

Our country to-day stands in marked contrast with the country of one century and a quarter ago. A mighty transformation has been wrought. It almost seems like the work of some strange magician. Where there were thousands, there are to-day millions. Vast cities have arisen where there were unbroken forests; hamlets have become populous municipalities, and far-reaching highways of commerce knit together vast sections of the country, then alien territory, undiscovered and unknown. The small people, contending against great odds, and having

but slight sympathy in other lands, have become a puissant republic, respected and honored as the most masterful nation among the sisterhood of nations.

The three millions have grown to more than eighty millions of people. New avenues of industry have been opened, and our industrial independence has been secured. American commerce is seeking the uttermost parts of the earth. Our territorial limits have been expanded and our flag is in two hemispheres, the visible emblem of American freedom. We have given to liberty a definition unknown to our fathers. They bequeathed to us a system of slavery. It rested upon us as a curse, but, inspired by the sacrifice of our fathers of the American Revolution, we in good time wiped it away. Yes, with the priceless blood of our youth, we completely dedicated our land to freedom—freedom that knows no color. Now, all may swell the sweet anthem:

My country, 'tis of thee,
Sweet land of liberty,
Of thee I sing.

Our country has expanded beyond the limits contemplated by those whose genius and courage founded it. The sphere of republican influence was not to exist only along the Atlantic seaboard. It was not to be so circumscribed. It was destined, in God's providence, to sweep away monarchical forms, and to extend westward to the Pacific. Spain and France and Mexico, in turn, yielded dominion of a part of their territory to us, territory which constitutes some of the richest portions of the United States.

The events of the past few years have given us an increased place in the affairs of the world. We are in touch with other powers as never before. The United States has an increased influence in the international council chamber. Our power and our sense of justice are recognized. Our diplomacy is not distrusted. We have not established a reputation for international intermeddling. We are not disposed to disturb the international peace, and we

do not seek to interfere with the domestic affairs of other powers. The advice of the sage of Mt. Vernon has not gone unheeded. While we are obliged to play a greater part in the affairs of the world than when Washington spoke, there is the same good reason for avoiding entangling alliances as then.

Our part in international affairs will be played with impartiality and absolute justice to other powers. We do not seek their territory, nor do we propose to disturb their institutions. We shall enter into a generous contest with them for our share of the world's commerce, but this, within the proper limits of the rights of nations. We shall push the conquests of peace through the genius and energy and co-operation of our labor and capital, to the uttermost parts of the earth. We shall send our flag into all ports of trade, not as a menace, but as the harbinger of peace and good-will.

We have witnessed an evolution in our industrial world. Old methods, old ways, are rapidly yielding to new methods and new ways. New conditions have arisen and will arise. We must deal with them without passion and with good judgment. It becomes us to deliberate and act wisely. We should take no counsel of the demagogue nor of the politician who looks to temporary advantage rather than to the fundamental question of right.

We should seek to teach lessons of fair dealing among men, to the end that the great forces in our upbuilding may act with perfect justice towards each other. Those who laid down their lives here did it, not in the interest of one, but in the interest of all.

The occasion will have failed in the accomplishment of its chief purpose, if it shall not fill us with a renewed determination faithfully to serve and guard well the State. The office we discharge is to benefit the living, not the dead. We are to draw herefrom new inspiration, which we shall carry into the discharge of our civic duties. We each and all owe a duty to the community and to the State. It is a posi-

tive duty, and that is, to aid in securing good laws and their faithful enforcement. We are not menaced by foreign foes. We have no fear of alien attack. We have nothing within to dread except the indifference of the intelligent citizen to the discharge of his civic obligations. In our domestic affairs we want something of the Spartan courage which led our fathers to make luminous and forever glorious the field of Monmouth.

We want no laws inspired by passion, nor do we want them administered by selfishness or incapacity. The best laws, wisely administered, are what we demand, and they can be secured if we but do our duty, a duty commanded by the sacrifice of those who sleep on this field, and by our own interests and the interests of those who shall follow us.

Hither, as unto a sacred shrine, the patriots will come in the centuries which stretch before us with such splendid promise, and bathe their souls in the higher and purer atmosphere of patriotism, and draw new inspiration from this field. Here they will see the phantom armies of Washington and Clinton engaged in an heroic death struggle. They will see again the hour of doubt and gloom, and then the banner of liberty will rise victorious and enrich the very air, and those who died to give it glory will tell them of the tremendous cost of American freedom.

From this historic spot will perpetually go forth an influence making for peace, fraternity and national solidarity. As our fathers, who bore the heat of battle one hundred and twenty-five years ago, and survived, left this historic field with renewed confidence in their cause, and an increased determination to serve well their country, so may we go hence with a larger love for our institutions, and with a new purpose to preserve them strong and undefiled. The republic of the United States! May she ever stand majestic and powerful, the everlasting symbol of human liberty.

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